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ABSTRACT

A program designed to reduce educational failures by setting up four model classrooms of pupils with potential learning problems is discussed. Each child will be actively involved in an enjoyable way using manipulative materials to develop concepts of thinking. The basic assumption of the classrooms is that the best way to attack a learning problem is to give massive successful experience with immediate positive reinforcement. The initial emphasis will be on modifying classroom behavior. Parents will be an essential part of the program, and the curriculum will be flexible. The three basic curriculum areas will be: adaptive school behavior, sensory-motor integration, and academics. (CK)

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Article to be submitted for publication in the Dean by Jeanne Gaynor Title VI-G Learning Disability Specialist.

EMPHASIS: PRESCRIPTION

In the past many primary children have needlessly experienced educational failures because their individual needs were not identified and considered in educational programing. The Federally funded Title VI-G project in Anchorage is designed to reduce these educational failures by setting up four model classrooms in 1973 for sixty children who have been identified as potential learning problems at the kindergarten - first grade level. These classrooms will operate under one basic assumption: that the most effective way to attack any learning problem is to give massive successful experiences with immediate positive reinforcement.

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Each child will be actively involved in a natural, enjoyable way using manipulative materials to develop concepts and processes of thinking in a classroom atmosphere that provides freedom of movement, but at the same time establishes routines that stress work habits. In the beginning, the major emphasis will be on modifying classroom behavior.

Vital to this program is the classroom teacher. No program of prevention is ready to begin until teachers are adequately prepared and dedicated to the fact that all children can learn and be successful. Teachers need careful training in reinforcement

behaviors, observations, teaching stratagies, and evaluation techniques so that effective diagnostic-prescriptive teaching may meet the immediate needs of the individual. These teachers must be willing to develop and use suggested techniques and materials provided by the project staff. The Learning Disability Specialist on the project staff will support and assist the teachers and parents by helping to define the modified curriculum and recommend specific materials, instructional aids and equipment. She will also conduct in-service workshops and do demonstration teaching.

Parents will be an essential part of this program as they participate in their children's education. This will include talking and planning sessions, working in the classrooms, attending in-service workshops and doing follow-up activities at home.

A flexible curriculum will include all learning activities influenced or implemented by the school. Performance criteria will be based on individual expectations rather than group averages. Material and techniques will be used as needed in view of individual strenghts and weakness.

Children with learning problems need materials that are simple, and geared for them. All material will be relevant, and child-centered. Instruction will be in small increments with the child correcting his own work whenever possible.

Children will be encouraged to work in pairs and in small groups to build social acceptance. Teaching will include a combination of whole class, small group and individual instruction.

Even though three basic areas of the curriculum will be included, no one area or sub-area will be taught in isolation but will be used to build skills in the other areas.

The first area, Adaptive School Behavior, will include social, emotional, and self development.

The second area, Sensory-mortor Integration will include all modalities of learning and processing. A clinical teaching approach will stress the intact modalities to utilize and facilitate learning in the deficit areas. Perceptual problems will be remediated when possible within an academic context using the multi-sensory method instruction when it proves most effective. The major emphasis will be on learning sound symbol relationships. We will constantly be concerned with a systematic monitoring of all work done to analyze what the child has accomplished and how he has managed to do this.

The third area of concentraiton, Academics, will include Language Arts (reading, writing, spelling, speaking) and Math/Science. Concentration will hinge upon language development, (receptive, expressive, associative) which has proven to be the basic pre-requiste to reading. Language will be incorporated into all

activites as the child will be encouraged to verbalize what he is doing. In all academic areas, concepts and thinking will be stressed.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this project will show that the regular classroom teacher, when given training and supportive services, can effectively educate the majority of young children with learning disabilities. This in turn will lead to early identification and to the development of a preventive, educational philosophy, rather than the current remedial education.

For further information concerning this project, contact Barbara Smart, Ph.D., Title VI-G Director, Denali School, 148 East 9th Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska 99504.

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